

Article appeared  
on page A-18

1 December 1978

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## *On the CIA's Lack of '20/20 Foresight'*

Press reports have told us the president is distressed about the failure of the CIA to have predicted the recent turmoil in Iran, and has expressed that distress in strong terms to Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the CIA.

Mr. Carter does not have far to look for the answer. Some months ago, it will be recalled, Adm. Turner undertook a massive "reorganization" of the CIA. He did it by throwing out several hundred top, seasoned, "operational" types, whose CIA careers had been devoted chiefly to the personal collection of intelligence abroad, mostly by clandestine means. The reasons, we were told, was that with all the highly sophisticated electronic and photographic intelligence-collection methods now available to us because of our superior American technology, there was no longer any need for the more messy and inexact procedures of personal collection.

That proved—as many recognized at the time—to be a disastrous judgmental error on the part of a man with no significant experience in or understanding of intelligence.

Spies in the sky can indeed perform wonders, and we should all be grateful

for their unique capabilities. But there is no technological substitute for the man—or the woman—on the spot. Revolts, revolutions and terrorist attacks are not customarily developed by machines. In deliberately cutting our intelligence system off from the bars, coffee houses and other non-technical places where indications of intentions—as distinguished from capabilities—are most apt to be picked up, we have left ourselves, as in the case of Iran, wide-open to being blindsided.

Even at best intelligence is an inexact and difficult business, and to expect 20/20 foresight in every case is to expect the impossible. The Israeli intelligence service, one of the best in the world, failed to anticipate the Yom Kippur war. But the sooner we recognize that no intelligence agency can possibly succeed without generous portions of the most traditional and essential ingredients of that ancient art—namely, the brains and sheer guts of individual human beings in direct touch with other human beings—the safer this United States of ours will be.

SAMUEL S. STRATTON,  
U. S. Representative (D-N.Y.)

Washington